

SOME REMARKS ON THE NORTHERN IRANIAN DIALECT OF THE ALAMŪT REGION*

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"There are many areas with dialects little or no recorded, such as the dialects in the Alborz mountains, stretching from Azarbaijan to Khorasan". G. L. Windfuhr (CLI, 1989, p. 295)

The high, isolated valley of Alamūt¹ in the Alborz mountains is famous for its chequered past. Conquered by the Ismā'īlīs in 1090, it became the centre of an isolated state that was to last 166 years and to pursue the objective of surviving amidst the domination of the Saljuqs, until the Mongols under Hülegü destroyed its power in the middle of the twelfth century. The name of Alamūt, the symbol of Ismā'īlī power, is usually associated with the strong, inaccessible fortress, where "The Grand Master of Assassins", Hasan-i Šabbāh, resided and planned "holy crimes" carried out by his *fedā'īs* or devotees. At present, although there are several sizeable ruins which the local inhabitants point out as being the remnants of the headquarters of "The Old Man of the Mountain", the real site of the fortress can hardly be identified with certainty. Some scholars, such as W. Ivanow, have maintained that the Alamūt fortress was located near the village of Gozarkhān,² but the name of Alamūt is now applied to the whole district.

The valley of Alamūt comprises the present *dehestāns* of Alamūt and Rūdbār, which meet in the *bakhš* of Rūdbār-e Alamūt in the *šahrestān* of Qazvin, the centre of which is Mo'allem Kalaya. Surrounded on all sides by mountains, the valleys of Rūdbār and Alamūt lie among the peaks of the Siyāh Lān range to the north and the Qazvin mountains to the south. The *bakhš* of Rūdbār-e Alamūt consists of six sub-districts: (1) Bālā Rūdbār, (2) Pāin Rūdbār (Havānak village), (3) Fišan, (4) Aqān, (5) Chahār nāhiye and (6) Andajrūd district (main villages: Andaj, Dik, Kuchnān, Vasang, Molā Kalāya).³

Relations with neighbouring valleys are facilitated by the similarity of the dialects. There are numerous differences of detail, since these dialects all represent various intermediary forms between the Caspian languages and the colloquial Persian of Tehran or Qazvin (the Bazari), which a hundred years ago was not well understood by everyone in the area.⁴ The vernacular common to the region is Azerbaijani Turkish. In all the villages on the Qazvin plain, the population is generally trilingual, speaking its local dialect, the Bazari and Turkish. The name of each dialect is taken from the main village in which it is

spoken. To ascertain the position of Alamūti with regard to other north-western dialects is a difficult task so long as our information on the general distribution of principal dialectal groups remains as fragmentary as it is at present. Many scholars present different views on the problem of classification of the north-western Iranian languages and dialects. Yarshater suggests that Alamūti is one of the five closely related north-western Iranian dialects, belonging to a larger group known as Tati.⁵ Tati does not refer to any particular dialect. This word is generally used to denote the Iranian-speaking peoples in the region. However, the designation of these dialects as Tati is general and vague. Yarshater proposes to call them "Median" which, according to him, is a more appropriate appellation since they seem to be modern descendants of the ancient Median dialects of the region.⁶ Another scholar, W. Ivanow, claims that Alamūti is an interesting form of transition language between the "Caspian" and "Central Persian" groups. "The dialect of Gozarkhon in Alamūti has obviously many Median elements in it, and is very closely connected with the language of the village Tājirish (in the north of Tehran), described by Prof. V. Zhukovski (Zhukovski 1922, pp. 395–432), and with some dialects of the Simnani group, which are closely connected with some local dialects spoken near Isfahan and Kashan. On the other hand, the Alamūti has adopted the "Caspian", chiefly Mazanderani, system of the *idāfa*, the Accusative, the Oblique or Possessive forms of Pronouns, &c."⁷ According to Windfuhr, Alamūti belongs to the group of ten closely-related dialects spoken in the north and north-west by Taleši and Tati speakers in a Turkophone environment.⁸ Lecoq suggests that the group to which belong Alamūti and Rūdbāri be called "Azari"⁹ and the Iranian scholar Mortazi Nesfat classifies them as belonging to the Caspian languages' branch.¹⁰ To solve the question of the proper classification and appellation of these dialects, one must realise that all of them derive from a multiplicity of Middle and Old Iranian predecessors, and that is why their diachrony is much more complex than is

often assumed. Another factor which should be taken into consideration is the process of rapid assimilation of the local dialects with the Bazari, due to the continuous mixing of local inhabitants and the growing influence of the trading centres. It is necessary to follow all these small dialects in their gradual transition by a study of the forms used in all the villages situated in Rudbār-e Alamūt. Systematic investigation is required both to reveal those dialects which may as yet be unknown, and also to clarify details of the known ones, which have been so far only lightly touched upon, as is the case of the Alamūti.

Notes on phonology

The vowel system of Alamūti presents nothing peculiar when compared to the Bazari of Qazvin or Tehran. Vowels are **a, ā, e, i, o, u**.

o—(P. *ā*, as in *ow* = P. *āb*, “water”, *aftow* = P. *aftāb* “sun”, *gow* = P. *gāv* “cow”) appears in many words instead of P. short *a*: *ton* = P. *tan* “body”, *tofāle* = *tapālāh* “cow-dung used as dried fuel”, *šow* = P. *šab* “night”.

i—(P. *e*) archaic feature¹¹ *piār* = P. *pedar* “father” (MP. *pidar*, OP *pitar*, Av. *pitā-*); *imruz* = P. *emruz* “today”.

e—(P. *i*) continues Middle Iranian long mid vowel as above: *šerni* = P. *širini* “sweets”, *est* = P. *ist* (Imp. from verb *istādan*) Consonants: laryngeal spirant **h**; uvular spirants **kh, gh**; uvular stop **q**; velar stops **k, g**; semi-vowels: back-palatal **y** and labial **w**; alveolar liquids **r, l**; alveolar spirant **š**; alveolar affricate **ch, j**; dental stops **t, d**; dental spirants **s, z**; naso-dental **n**; labio-dental spirants **f, v**; labial stops **p, b**; and naso-labial **m**.

The most characteristic features of the Alamūti consonantal system may be summarised as follows:

(1) The preservation of the ancient **s**, where P. has **h**, as in *luos* = P. *rubāh* “fox” (MP. *rōbāh*, Av. *raopi-š*, Skt. *lopāśa*).

(2) The preservation of the northern (Avestan? Median?) forms with /**z**/ phoneme, where Old Persian developed **d**: *zamā* = P. *dāmād* “son-in-law” (Av. *zāmātar-*, but MP. *dāmād*, Skt. *jāmātar-*).

(3) The preservation of the ancient **p** where Persian has **f**, as in *espi* = P. *sefid*¹² “white” (MP. *siped-*, Av. *spaeta-*).

(4) Dental-alveolar liquid **r** often appears as **ʔ**: *goftāl* = P. *goftār* “speech”, *valg* = P. *barg* “leaf”, *talkhān* = P. *tarkhun* “tarragon”, *chelg* = P. *cherk* “dirt”.

(5) Initial **b, g** are occasionally pronounced as **v**: *varg* = P. *gorg* “wolf” (Av. *uhrka-*, MP. *gurg*), *verāz* = P. *gerāz* “boar”, *varre* = P. *barre* “lamb” (MP. *warrag*), *vahman* = P. *bahman* “a king of Persia, avalanche, a male name meaning intelligent”, *vache* = P. *bache* “child”, *varf* = P. *barf* “snow” (MP. *wafr*, Av. *vafra-*), *vas* = P. *bas* “enough”.

(6) The front-palatal **zh** sound does not occur within a word. Generally, where P. has **zh** (foreign phoneme) or **z** < OP **j**, in Alamūti, there is **j**: *bijan* = P. *bizhan* “a name of a hero”, *tij* = P. *tiz* “sharp”, *ābijār* = P. *ābi zār* “irrigated field”, *jir* = P. *zir* “under”. Persian **zh** is found in the few borrowings from the North-Western dialects, since this sound is typical for the northern development of consonant alveolar affricate **j - zh**. However, it is found neither in Alamūti nor in the Tati dialects,¹³ which have preserved the archaic **j**. Moreover, the loanwords from the European languages with **zh** sound also have **j**: *jāndārm* = P. *zhāndārm* “gendarme”, *bioloji* = P. *biolozi* (both from French).

(7) Uvular spirant **kh** usually disappears (a general tendency to simplify speech): *detar* = P. *dokhtar* “daughter”, *baduten* = P. *dukhtan* “to sew”, *tal* = P. *talkh* “bitter”, *sut* = P. *sukht* “fuel”.

(8) Final **b** has a tendency to be pronounced as an unvoiced spirant **f**: *asf* = P. *asb* “horse”, *jif* = P. *jib* “pocket”, *jevāf* = P. *javāb* “answer”, *joref* = P. *jurāb* “sock”, *sif* = P. *sib* “apple”.

(9) Final **t** disappears: *das* = P. *dast* “hand”, *dārbas* = P. *dārbast* “trellis”, or becomes the voiced stop **d**: *davād* = P. *davāt* “inkpot”.

(10) The geminate **-mm-** usually takes the place of **-mb-**: *došamme* = P. *došambe* “Monday”, *domme* = P. *dombe* “fat (tail)”.

Notes on morphology

(1) The suffix of the plural is **-ān**, **-(e)kān** = P. *ān*, or less frequently **ā** = P. *hā*. The suffix **-ān**, which is a continuation of the older genitive plural ending (MP G. Pl. *-ān* (*am*)), is used both for animate and inanimate nouns (in classical Persian this suffix was added only to animate nouns)—people or higher animals): *berār* “brother”—*berārān*, *gou* “cow”—*gouān*, *valg* “leaf”—*valgān*. In nouns ending in a vowel **-e**, the **-e** is dropped and the form **-ekān** is added: *vache* “child”—*vachekān*.

(2) The absence of the *idāfa* construction as a genuine form and the use of the antecedent genitive (the ending **-e**), which precedes the noun it modifies (as in the Caspian dialects): *gate berār* “elder brother”, *jevāne zen* “young woman”, *lase chaken* “long tongue”.

(3) The personal pronouns are: **mi** (**men-i**), **ti, u** (**ou**), **mā, šomā, ušan** (**onā** = P. *ānān*). In the status constructus, they appear as **mi, ti, ui, māy, šomāy, ošāni** (**onāy**): *mi ketāb* “my book”, *mi šine* “it is mine” (P. *māl-e man ast*), *ti šine* “it is yours” etc. The Arabic noun *māl* “property, wealth”, used in Persian, is used in Alamūti only to denote such property as herds of cows, oxes, lambs etc.

(4) In Alamūti, there is a great variety of modal affixes employed in verbal conjugations: **be-** is a perfective particle, which occurs normally in

the imperative, subjunctive, optative, preterite, perfect, pluperfect, infinitive and the past participle: *bekhāssen* "to want", *betāse* "shaven", *bedāym* "we gave". The vowel of this prefix may vary according to the phonetic context: *bi-*, *ba-* (*vā-*) *biyeymiyan* "to come", *biyassa* "he stopped", *biyas* "stay", *bāporsiyān* "to ask", *baket* "he fell", *bazen* "beat it". Old preverbs like *bar* "on" merged with the stem and are no longer separable: *vagerdassen* = P. *bar gaštan* "to come back", *varessen* = P. *bar khaštan* "to rise". In complex and compound verbs *be-* is not employed: *niyā korden* = P. *negāh kardan* "to look".

me- (regularly palatalised into *i* before *y*: *mī-*) is an imperfective particle, which expresses a continuing action and is used in the present, imperfect and the continuous perfect (imperfectum compositum, auditivum tense):¹⁴ *miām* "I come", *miyeymiyam* "I was coming", *mīšanam* "I pour", *mīšandom* "I was pouring", *mīšande-ey* "you have been pouring (as I heard)".

ha-/hā-/hey- apparently also perfective: *hadā* "he gave", *hadeym* "we gave", *haden* "give", *hamiddā* "he was giving"; *hākord* "he did, he made", *hāgut* "he said", *hāmine* "he does, he makes" (a trace of the old perfective particle *hamē*, which expressed a continuing action in Pahlavi and classical Persian); *hey* "he took", *heyrom* "(that) I take";

da-/de- also perfective particle (as in Kurdish); *dabesten* "to close, bind", *dabesse* "closed", *dakon* "do it", *dabe* "he was", *debiyam* "I was". This verbal affix may be also the preposition meaning "in" (used rarely): *da korden* = P. *dākhel kardan* "to enter, bring in".

ne-/ni- the negative affix, which precedes the imperfective affix *me-/mī-*, or is added to the past stem, as in contemporary Persian *nemiām* "I do not come", *niyeymiyey* "you did not come".

(5) Formation of tenses follows the same rules as in Persian. Personal suffixes of the present are: Sg. 1st p. **-ām** (**om**), 2nd p. **-ey**, 3rd p. **-ā** (**ad**); Pl. 1st p. **-eym**, 2nd p. **-eyd**, 3rd p. **-ān** (**end**). The suffixes of the past tenses are the same, except the 3rd p. Sg. where there is no suffix. Cf. the verb *biyeymiyān* = P. *āmadan* "to come", present Sg. 1. *miām*, 2. *miyey*, 3. *miyā*; Pl. 1. *miyeym*, 2. *miyeyd*, 3. *miyān*; preterit Sg. 1. *biyāmiyam*, 2. *biyāmiyey*, 3. *biyāme*, Pl. 1. *biyeymiyeym*, 2. *biyeymiyeyd*, 3. *biyeymiyān* (the accent on the last but one syllable, contrary to the infinitive, which sounds the same).

(6) The Persian verb *dāštan* "to have", in its present tense is used here (as in Simnani) instead of the substantive verb: *darem* = P. *hastam* "I am", *dare* = *hast* "he is", etc.

(7) The majority of regular verbs and the verbal prefixes are the same as in Bazari, sometimes with only very slight phonetical alternations. As in other northern dialects the verbs *raftan* "to go" and *šodan*

"to become" have merged in one form *bašiyān*. The infinitive is formed from the past stem, the infinitive morphemes: **-an/-en** and most frequently the prefix **be-**, when the stem is plain.

Archaisms in vocabulary

Alamūti has conserved some startling archaisms. It contains a number of words in large part inherited from Old and Middle Iranian (mostly Avestan and Middle Persian).

(1) **nakās** "eaves of a roof" (a house and eaves of its roof is like a man, who stands with a hand at his forehead looking ahead)—Av. *nikāsa-*, OP. *nikās*, MP. *niḡāh*, P. *negāh* "to look, observe";

(2) **dār** "tree"—Av. *dārav-*, *dāuru-* "a piece of wood", MP. *dār*, OP. *duruva*, P. *derakht*.¹⁵ In Classical Persian (especially in poetry), *dār* meant "high tree", now in contemporary Persian it means "gal-lows" or "staff (of a flag)".

(3) **kerk** "bird, hen, domestic fowls, poultry"—Av. *kahrka-* "harsh sound made by a cock", *kahrkāsa-* "vulture", Skt. *kṛka-vaku* "hen", MP. *kark*, *karkak*, P. *karkas/kargas* "vulture".

(4) **kupā** or **kufā** "heap, pile" and also "truncated pyramids of mowed grass"—Av. *kaofa-*, Skt. *kupa-*, OP. *kaufa*, MP. *kōf*, P. *kuh* "mountain".

(5) **ruch** "day"—this word is preserved in the names of two villages in the region of Bālā Alamūt, Bālā ruch and Pāin ruch—Av. *raoča-* "light", OP. *rauča-*, MP. *rōz*, P. *ruz*.

(6) **put** "rotten, decayed"—in Zand Avesta: *putak*, P. *pusidan* "to rot, decay".

(7) **tij** "sharp"—LAv. *brōiūrā taēza-* "sharp blade", P. *tiz* "sharp".¹⁶

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* This work is based mainly on the manuscripts of Mr Ziya al-Din Šahrūzi, who in the late seventies was a student of Mashhad University's Faculty of Literature. Mr Šahrūzi, a native of Alamūt, made a great effort to describe his mother tongue. Unfortunately, due to certain inauspicious circumstances he was not able to complete his work. Now the present author has entered upon the task of continuing his work and of elaborating a monograph on the little-known and partly-forgotten Alamūti dialect.

¹ According to the Persian legend, an eagle indicated the site on a rocky crest to Wahsūdān b. Marzubān, one of the rulers of Daylam. It was a place where eagles used to sit and learn to fly. Hence, allegedly, the name from *āloh* (eagle) and *amū(kh)t* (taught). See Daftary, 1990, p. 166; Browne, 1907, II, p. 202.

² See Ivanow, 1931, p. 354; Daftary, 1990, p. 340.

³ Sotudeh, 1345, pp. 111–24.

⁴ Col. Monteith, 1833, p. 15.

⁵ The Tati dialects of the Caucasus, which derived from Persian, or a dialect similar to it, do not belong to this group (i.e. they belong to the south-western branch of Iranian languages). See Yarshater, 1969, p. 17.

⁶ Yarshater, 1969, p. 17.

⁷ Ivanow, 1931, p. 357.

⁸ Windfuhr, 1989, p. 295.

⁹ "Les dialectes āzari (appelés tātī dans l'usage local) peuvent être répartis

en cinq groupes: (1) les dialectes du NW, parlés dans le Harzand et le Dizmār: hazarandī, keringānī, (2) les dialectes du NE, parlés dans le Xalxāl et le Tārom: šālī, kajālī, etc., (3) les dialectes du S, parlés au sud de Qazvin: tākestānī, čālī, ēstehārdī, etc., (4) les dialectes du SW, parlés au sud-ouest de Zanjān: xoinī, (5) les dialectes du SE, parlés au nord-est de Qazvin: rudbārī, alamūti, etc." Lecoq, 1989, pp. 296–7.

¹⁰ Caspian languages and dialects: (1) māzanderānī, (2) tāleši, (2) gīlakī, (3) tālaqānī, (4) alamūti and rudbārī, (5) dilmānī, (6) gorgānī and esterābādī. See Nesfat, 1341, pp. 111–24.

¹¹ After the 13th century, foreign transcriptions start to display certain divergencies from the state represented by classical Persian. The divergencies manifest themselves in the tendencies /i/→/e/ and /ē/→/i/. The first change occurs chiefly in the neighbourhood of the syllable containing /a/, Bodrogligeti, 1971, p. 43; the other one is interrelated with identification with the existing /i/ and thus coalescence of two phonemes.

¹² Such a fluctuation as *isped/siped* allows us to perceive here a prosthetic vowel. This suggests the existence of initial consonantal clusters at the stage preceding the MP period. Those clusters existed probably in MP language up to the 7th century. See Pisowicz, 1985, p. 146.

¹³ *zh* is treated as an allophone of *j*: /j/ when followed by the voiced dental stop /d/ becomes fricative. In Southern Tati dialects: *hezde* "eighteen", *nuzde* "nineteen", *ezhdeha* "dragon"; Yarshater, 1969, p. 33.

¹⁴ The inferential forms expressing conclusions, second-hand knowledge, reminiscence, etc., appear here probably under Turkish influence. These forms are based on the perfective. See Windfuhr, 1982, pp. 263–87.

¹⁵ *p. derakht* "tree" is derived from another PIE stem **dher-* "to hold": Av. *dhar-* "to hold", *draxta-* "standing firm", MP. *draxt*, while *dār* (MP. *dār*) originated from PIE **dereu-* "tree". See Walde-Pokorny, 1927–32, vol. 1, pp. 804, 856.

¹⁶ PIE **g-* – Indo-Ir. *j*, PreIran. *z*, which in Avestan, in the intervocalic position appeared as *ž*.